

# Colby Library Quarterly



*February 1958*

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Communications regarding subscriptions should be addressed to the Librarian; communications regarding articles in the QUARTERLY should be addressed to Carl J. Weber. Unsolicited manuscripts should be accompanied by postage stamps and addressed envelopes. In general, this QUARTERLY is interested in Maine authors (for example, in Sarah Orne Jewett and Edwin Arlington Robinson) and in Maine history, and in those books and authors from outside of Maine (Henry James and Thomas Hardy, for example) who are well represented by special collections in the Colby College Library or who have exerted an influence on Maine life or letters.

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# Colby Library Quarterly

Series IV

February 1958

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THOMAS BIRD MOSHER

By ALFRED K. CHAPMAN

ALTHOUGH Thomas Bird Mosher is often spoken of as a distinguished Portland publisher, it is a curious fact that many native Portlanders were not familiar with either his name or his work. In nearly every account of him which I have found, there occurs a statement of how few Portland people knew anything about him. One visitor to Portland, in seeking Mr. Mosher, asked several leading professional and business men concerning his whereabouts, only to encounter blank ignorance of any such person. A writer once remarked (*Maine Library Bulletin*, January 1927, page 64) that Mosher was probably better known in Australia than in Portland, Maine. It appears reasonably likely that he was better known in London than anywhere else, partly because of his piracies of various English authors. On his one trip to England he did not lack for friends and acquaintances. In Portland, however, he apparently worked quietly, had a small but very close and loyal group of friends, and did his extensive publishing business largely by mail.

It may be remarked in passing that Mr. Mosher had a distant and indirect connection with Colby College. One of his friends, Fred V. Mathews (Colby, Class of 1879), lived almost next door to Mr. Mosher, and Mr. Mathews and his wife later wrote an account of their recollections of the publisher. When published, this account carried a foreword by Dr. Edward F. Stevens (Colby, Class of 1889).

Mosher's publishing business was extensive, for in the

course of thirty years he published five hundred or more books, and for twenty of those years he issued a little monthly pamphlet which he called *The Bibelot*. Both ventures as carried out by him were, in their way, unique, as were his sales catalogs. In these he inserted so many rare gems from his extraordinary reading that part of them were eventually collected in a volume which he called *Amphora*, and more of them were collected and published in a second *Amphora* volume after Mosher's death.

This bald statement of his achievements is, however, misleading unless it is qualified by remarks about the rare critical judgment Mosher exercised in making his selections, not only for the monthly *Bibelot* and the catalogs but also for the books which he published. These books were mostly reprints of classics which Mr. Mosher particularly liked and often thought were not so well known as they should be. Secondly, they were remarkable for the beautiful formats in which they were issued. Mosher would never have attained such fame except for the sheer beauty of the books which he published. He particularly liked to use hand-made paper and was meticulous about type and format. His designs, though simple, were always attractive. And Mosher's fine books were inexpensive. His whole purpose would have been defeated had his books not been within the reach of the ordinary book-lover's pocketbook. Unlike most modern reprints, they were not cheap; rather they were inexpensive.

Furthermore, a statement of Mosher's achievements would be misleading without a mention of his prefaces. If he did not find a preface which he liked and could lift and print as it was, he usually wrote one himself. His tastes were highly individual and his standards exacting; consequently he wrote many prefaces in which his taste, judgment and critical acumen are revealed. The lovers of Mosher's books speak time after time of his prefaces.

What was the background of this man who during thirty years built up a flourishing though highly personal pub-

lishing business, who published inexpensive books so beautiful that they are not inappropriately spoken of along with those of the famous Kelmscott Press of William Morris, and who at the same time accumulated in his Portland home an extraordinarily fine personal library?

In the first place, Thomas B. Mosher was uneducated, "as uneducated," says Christopher Morley, "as Chaucer and Lamb and Conrad."<sup>1</sup> Mosher himself speaks with satisfaction of having "escaped college." Born in Biddeford, Maine, on September 11, 1852, a direct descendant of the second settler of the town of Gorham, he went in due course to the public schools of Biddeford and later of Boston—until he was fourteen years of age. He had no formal schooling after that, although he was awarded an honorary M.A. by Bowdoin College in 1906. His father was a sea captain, and for some happy reason he withdrew the boy from school and took the youngster off to sea with him for the next five years. When he left, young Mosher bewailed the barrel of paper-bound volumes of dime novel caliber which his father insisted on leaving behind. In its place was a shelf of books, mostly classics, with which his father had provided the boy's cabin, and there were many long hours for reading as the ship sailed the oceans of the world.

There was, however, one set of books which had more influence on the young Mosher than any other reading which he had done. One day in Hamburg, Germany, Mosher and his father went into a second-hand bookshop and bought a set of Bell's *British Theatre*. Mosher describes the experience in these words:

This particular collection bore a delicately written signature of an unchronicled and shadowy Jane Sonntag in each of its thirty-four volumes, unearthed in an old second-hand bookshop near the Elbe, where, on the top shelf, it had waited for the coming of the small American. Other and later, perhaps better and wiser, book loves

<sup>1</sup> "A Dogwood Tree," in *John Mistletoe* (Garden City, N. Y., Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1931), p. 317.

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have I met in the mid-forest of life; but it is Bell's *British Theatre* which first unlocked to me the treasure-trove of English literature.

We get a picture of the young boy reading during the long, lonely hours at sea in a further description which he gives of himself:

No, I shall never read books again as I read them in my early seafaring, when all the world was young, when the days were of tropic splendor, and the long evenings were passed with my books in a lonely cabin, lighted by a primitive oil lamp, while the ship was plowing through the boundless ocean.<sup>2</sup>

For five years this fruitful life at sea continued for the young Mosher. During five years at sea one can read many books, and we may suspect that by the end of the period the foundation of Mosher's literary interests was laid. There is in his work little direct evidence of his life at sea. He did, however, use Aldus's device of the anchor and dolphins on the title page of many of his books.

In 1871, faced with the common problem of earning a living for himself, Mosher became a clerk in a publishing house on Exchange Street in Portland. In every account of him the next twenty years of his life are passed over quickly, for it was not until 1891, when he was nearly forty years of age, that he launched out on the career which made him famous. Most of those twenty years were spent in Portland, although he did go to the West for a year or two. Part of the time he worked as a bookkeeper. Then in 1882 he went into business with Ruel T. McLellan and became one of the partners of a firm known as McLellan, Mosher and Co. They were law stationers. Of going into this business Mosher remarked:

I had made a failure of everything else, and I had to borrow money to go into business. The man who lent it to me thought he would lose it, but he lent it to me because he loved me.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Mosher, quoted in *Current Opinion*, 76 (February 1924), p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177.

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For eight years this partnership continued. In the twenty years' association with publishing in one form or another Mosher doubtless learned a great deal about paper, printing, and other technicalities of publishing. Also, in twenty years, one who loves to read can read a great many books, even if the spare time is limited. And Mosher was blessed with a very retentive memory. In twenty years, also, the vague ideas and uncertainties about what one wants to do have plenty of time to crystallize.

It is not often, however, at forty years of age, that the crystallization carries over into such an action as launching a new and uncertain publishing venture on one's own. With Mosher, when the idea of what he wanted to do became clear, he clung to it and planned how he could carry it out. The idea of doing what you like to do was very important to him. Professor Pottle quotes a conversation with Mosher:

"Do you know what you would like to do?" he said to me once. "You can't succeed at anything else."

And Professor Pottle goes on to marvel at the courage of this man who, with little schooling, with a sense of having been a failure in business, could dare to start a publishing business of his own and be a success in it. But for Mosher his life career really began at forty and lasted for another thirty-two years until his death in 1923.

He set up shop on the second floor of an old building at 45 Exchange Street in Portland. There was a print shop on the floor above, where Mosher had his books printed. Exchange Street runs off Congress Street at the City Hall down toward the waterfront, and 45 was well down toward the wharves. The only sign was an inconspicuous lettering on the door jamb that T. B. Mosher, publisher of fine books, had his office on the second floor. Up a narrow and worn stairway one came to another sign, "Thomas B. Mosher, Publisher," on the office door.

But the room inside the door became another world. Professor Pottle at the time of Mosher's death wrote the best description of it:

Oh, that room! The warmth, the dusk, the fragrance of it! Lighted on the front by windows opening over the street, but in the corners at the back dim with a mellow duskiness. . . . Books all around you to a height easily reached from the floor. . . . Facing you as you entered, a great fireplace of brick with blue plates on the mantel ledge, a fire of hard wood smouldering and glowing, the fragrance of maple smoke in the air. . . . In the center of the room, facing the fireplace, a great comfortable davenport, and backed up to it a little bookcase with all the Mosher books. . . . Around the walls, small framed pictures of authors; you recognized Yeats, Swinburne, J. A. Symonds, and an unusual Lincoln. . . . But, then, from a desk by the window a man rose and came forward towards you, his hand extended in greeting. You knew at once that it was Mr. Mosher.<sup>4</sup>

Mr. Charles Dunn, Jr., a Portland friend of Mr. Mosher, describes sitting, like Professor Pottle, in the midst of the books before the log fire,

listening to Mr. Mosher's talk of men and books and of his own unique experience as a book-hunter, partaking of his genial humor and enjoying his occasional satirical comment.<sup>5</sup>

Professor Pottle says that Mr. Mosher's voice went with the laughter in the eyes and the lips; a quizzical, throaty voice with a velvet-soft rasp to it and a frequent chuckle—not a laugh; only a single note of amusement deep in the throat.

He then goes on to quote a few sample comments:

"The Prophet says that the heart of mankind is desperately wicked." I hear him say: "I think it would be better to say that the heart of mankind is desperately stupid." A chuckle. "The reformers will never completely divorce genius from vice, I fear." Another chuckle.

Though Mosher was concerned mostly with the beauties of literature, he also had a taste for Rabelais and his brethren.

<sup>4</sup> "Aldi Discipulus Americanus" by Frederick A. Pottle, in *The Literary Review* (New York, December 29, 1923), p. 410.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, quoted in *Maine Library Bulletin*, 12 (January 1927), p. 63.

ren, and a saltiness like that of the sea could on occasion flavor his conversation.

In due time Mosher employed a secretary, for his correspondence was tremendous, and welcome, for the letters often brought checks for his books, which he sold largely by mail order through his catalogs; and he had two or three other employees to handle the work. The publishing business flourished. He had married in 1892, and he, his wife, and two sons lived in a fine house on the outskirts of Portland, where he had his great library of rare and choice volumes far more extensive than the library in his office.

But in speaking of his office and home we have got far ahead of our story. The publishing business was started in 1891, and for some time the going was hard. It is reported that in the early days Mosher and his sister would load themselves with books and go from door to door in one Maine city after another trying to peddle their wares. The first book published was Meredith's *Modern Love*, a series of sonnets derived from Meredith's unhappy first marriage. "Why, of all the books he had to choose from, all the books he later published, did he choose that particular one?" asks Professor Pottle. And then he gives us the answer. "It was because the last line of that poem sequence expressed the idea which all his life had gripped him so mightily—the soul of the Mosher books: 'To throw that faint, thin line upon the shore.'"

About fifteen years after he had started publishing, Mosher, in a foreword to one of his catalogs, explained in detail what he had in mind:

Often I have been asked: "Had you any motive other than craftsmanship in shaping your material?" In answer I like to assert my belief that my choice has been, and is, guided by a unifying principle which is responsible for whatever I may select or discard. Confessedly, my work has opened the gates of a luminous world to me. And for this very reason I would transmit what light I may to others, even as in races of old, relays of runners passed on the burning torch. I am con-

vinced that in literature alone is to be found and cherished the personal might which brings together vanished past and living present. Hence what I have learned from sun and storm may I not in my books make over to the men and women who reach out through intellectual sympathy and touch hands with me. The soul of literature is not a dead soul. Its poets and prophets are forever vocable, creating a divine unrest which must unite us all as Brethren of the Book.

Moreover, I see the thing of beauty in art, in letters, in music,—in a word, the beauty of an idea,—is given to few to create, while to enjoy should be the inalienable birthright of all. Conceivably this thing of beauty might be hidden in obscurity of woeful type and wretched paper, at what risk of almost absolute defacement!<sup>6</sup>

Consider the last sentence in Mosher's statement of purpose. To him a work of beauty should be published in a beautiful form. At the same time it should be as widely available as possible. Though he is a publisher of fine books and though he is himself a collector of rare items, it is for the booklover, not for the collector, that he is publishing. Good taste and fine materials are more important to him than expensive and elaborate bindings. He saves money, in the first place, by publishing things which cost him little, or more usually nothing, for copyright privileges. Mosher had the reputation of being a pirate, a reputation which he doubtless deserved, although his piracies are of a benevolent sort which are more likely to be beneficial than harmful to his victims. He always used fine paper, very often handmade paper. His judgment about type forms and page make-up was exacting, but he was not particularly an innovator.

It is doubtless true that fine printing in America received a stimulus from the work of William Morris and his Kelmscott Press. We can see Morris's influence on Mosher in at least one volume, Arnold's *Empedocles on Etna*. But notice that William Morris did not issue his first book until 1891, the same year in which Mosher published in Portland, Maine, his first book, Meredith's *Modern Love*.

<sup>6</sup> Mosher, quoted in *Maine Library Bulletin*, 12 (January 1927), p. 63.

Mosher did not generally use the startling types which were being employed by some other American book-designers, but published his books upon classical lines. His work was so good that Harry Lyman Koopman, a Colby graduate in the Class of 1880 and for a long time Librarian of Brown University, speaking before the Grolier Club (of which Mosher had been a member), was able to remark that "our discussion of modern fine printing in America may well begin with the work of Mosher," and he speaks of every book of Mosher as "a genuine composition."

The designs of Mosher's books were usually simple but in excellent taste, and showed an originality of mind not in daring innovations in form so much as in the most skillful use of means already at hand. He shared with Morris an interest in beauty of form, but he differed from Morris in his concern that this beauty of form should be provided at so low a cost that any booklover could afford to buy. Though Mosher's forms might vary from an impressive quarto to a tiny pamphlet, he was not interested in publishing a Kelmscott *Chaucer*. But his work in America is simultaneous with that of Morris in England, and an evidence of some of the same basic impulse. Furthermore, it is good enough to be spoken of, within the limits of his purpose, with the Morris work. Of Mosher's last volume, Keats's *Odes, Sonnets and Lyrics* (1922), Maxwell Steinhardt, writing in the *Quarto Club Papers* in 1926 remarked:

The Keats item is typical of his method and art. . . . It is printed on good paper, in clean, pleasing type, under an effective blue cardboard cover on which appeared a flowered ornament in black. It is prefaced by a foreword of his own and embellished with biographical and bibliographical notes. To my mind a worthier offering to the poet than the ponderous biography of the Back Bay Sappho.

As Mr. Koopman points out:

Mr. Mosher's printing, or rather book-design, cannot be separated from his publishing, for which he deserves no less credit. It was his service to his countrymen to introduce to them a selection of choice but not popular literature that was an excellent corrective of provincialism and of content with the commonplace.

We get a further idea of Mosher's principle of selection, so far as his choice of what books to publish goes, in a comment of his own in one of his catalogs:

At the outset I wanted to make only a few beautiful books, and to that end could think of nothing more suited to my purpose than what I have chosen. The things *I* loved and wanted *others* to love. It has come to this precisely: I can only go on doing a few things well; there is no other way worth trying. True, beautiful things, like ugly things, have their day, and pass; but do they really cease to be? A thing that is once beautiful, truly beautiful, is always beautiful.

It was, then, some of the things which seemed to Mr. Mosher to be truly beautiful and which often had the added charm of having their beauty not sufficiently noticed, or which seemed in danger of being undeservedly forgotten, that he most often chose to publish. As Richard Le Gallienne says:

Mr. Mosher has brought together the names whose mere mention at once suggests the beauty, the passion, the pathos of existence; all that in literature which we connect especially with such writers as Theocritus, Villon, Omar, De Quincey, Pater, Morris, Rossetti.<sup>7</sup>

And yet we find that there are also sturdier names in his list, such as Milton, Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Browning, Meredith, and Whitman. He published the *Book of Ecclesiastes* and Omar, and a little-known poem of Oriental philosophy written by Sir Richard Burton in the mid-nineteenth century. One of the books of which he was most proud was Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. Shelley, Blake, Stevenson, Emerson, Dobson, Baudelaire, Dowson, Vernon Lee, and Hewlett are other names on the list. Notice that he could publish a modern author who pleased

<sup>7</sup> Fred V. Matthews, *Thomas Bird Mosher* (Portland, The Southworth-Anthoensen Press, 1941), p. 15.

just as quickly as an older one. The foreign literature which he published, including the Latin and Greek, he had read only in translation, for he knew no language but English.

He published both poetry and prose; for example, one of his best jobs was an edition of Gissing's *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* for which he wrote a prefatory note, followed by an excellent critical essay by Thomas Secombe which had originally appeared in Gissing's *House of Cobwebs*. Mosher associated the essay with a far better piece of writing than that with which it had first appeared.

Nor was he lacking in the scholarship needed to add critical notes, or to give biographical or bibliographical information. He was not concerned with what we call standard editions; he would scan his textual sources with care and select according to his own best judgment. His library contained many rare editions of those authors whom he most loved, but there were in it no sets of the standard editions which the ordinary library seeks.

Soon after the publication of *Modern Love* he started publication of the little monthly pamphlets called *The Bibelot*. He describes them as "a reprint of Poetry and Prose for booklovers, chosen in part from scarce editions and sources not generally known." He tells how the idea for this project came to him one night; he woke up his wife to tell her about it, and they discussed it until morning. For twenty years the publication of *The Bibelot* was continued. The issuing of these little twenty-four-page fifty-cent pamphlets might in itself have made Mosher famous. Here more than anywhere else are the exquisite things which he as it were "disinterred" and restored to light. Here we can see how widely he had read and what sort of thing particularly took his fancy. Here also were modern things as well as older ones. As early as 1900 he was hailing Yeats or Lionel Johnson and was defending free verse.

There is a delightful essay by Christopher Morley in which he comments on *The Bibelot*. Morley says:

I suppose it is the most sentimental omnibus that ever creaked through the cypress groves of Helicon. Like all men of robust, game-some, and carnal taste, Mosher had a special taste for the divine melancholies of ink.<sup>8</sup>

When Mosher was twitted about this, he attempted some lighter numbers, but they were not so successful. Morley goes on to speak of him as a "rare Elizabethan," and to qualify his statements by saying that Mosher "was by no means an indiscriminate all-swallower; his critical gusto was nipping and choice"; and to speak of the irony and the memorable phrases to be found in the prefaces. Morley goes on:

Take it beam or sheer, *The Bibelot* is an anatomy of melancholy. It has been called an encyclopedia of the literature of rapture. ... Mosher loved the dark-robed Muse: he imprisoned her soft hand and let her rave; he fed deep upon her peerless eyes.<sup>9</sup>

And finally he comments: "however sharp his taste for the fragile and lovely, there was surely a rich pulse of masculine blood in his choices." *The Bibelot* began and ended with passages from William Blake.

Of the two *Amphora* volumes little needs to be added. They were anthologies of short selections which Mosher had found appropriate to use in his book catalogs. The first one was brought out by Mosher himself at the suggestion of some of the recipients of his catalogs. The second one including selections from his later catalogs was brought out after his death. In the preface to the first *Amphora* he expressed his purpose:

My *Amphora*, then, O friends whom I may never meet nor greet other than in these words, is not a cinerary urn such as Sir Thomas Browne discovered, filled with ashes of forgotten funeral fires, and so wondrously discoursed upon in a manner that shall outlast his unrav-

<sup>8</sup> Morley, *John Mistletoe*, p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

ished relics of some lost Roman camp, but rather a vessel still containing in unspoiled solution a genuine and generous juice of the most high Muses.

There now remains one aspect of Mosher's work to be mentioned, his piracies, for Mosher *was* a literary pirate. Jacob Blanck, writing in the *Publisher's Weekly* in January 1942, after the Mosher Press had passed into the hands of the Williams Book Store in Boston, declared: "The history of the Mosher Press is one of the final episodes in the history of literary piracy in the United States and a chapter in the development of American fine printing." When Mosher found lying around loose something which he wanted to use, he had no hesitation about appropriating it. Occasionally his piracies got him into trouble, but for the most part they did their victims good service by making them better known than they otherwise would have been. Mosher was reputedly deterred from piracy only once, and that was when James A. MacNeil Whistler threatened prompt action if Mosher proceeded with his announced intention to publish one of Whistler's essays. Mosher did not issue the piece. Christopher Morley, after acknowledging that Mosher was often accused of piracy, makes a classic defense of the publisher:

If it be piracy to take home a ragged waif of literature found lonely by the highway, to clothe her in the best you have and find her rich and generous friends—if this be piracy, then let any other publisher who has never ploitered a little in the Public Domain cast the first Stone and Kimball. The little upstairs fireside on Exchange Street, Portland, is one of the most honorable shrines that New England can offer to the beadsman of beauty.<sup>10</sup>

The most famous of Mosher's piracies was the publication of a beautiful edition of Andrew Lang's *Aucassin and Nicolette*. Lang protested vigorously and made dark and dangerous threats. Most other authors, however, were apparently content to be pirated by Mosher or at least did

<sup>10</sup> Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

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not protest. Richard Le Gallienne defends Mosher when he says:

Possibly, I take an immoral view of such so-called literary piracy; yet it seems to me mere childishness, when one has neglected properly to protect one's literary property, to complain if someone exercises his undoubted legal right of taking a fancy to it. Actually, I rejoice no little that so much exquisite literature would seem to have been thus left unprotected; for in that neglect has been the opportunity of Mr. Mosher's enthusiasm, and by reason of it many lovely things that, in the indifferent hands of their "legitimate" sponsors, stood a fair chance of oblivion, have been rescued and displayed for our "delight in widest commonalty spread."<sup>11</sup>

In old age Mosher himself told Robert Frost "how he would pick up a poem by some writer overseas who otherwise would never have been known to the United States, print the piece, and send payment direct to the author." If Mosher is remembering correctly that he sent the check, it is easy to see why these tactics would not cause much trouble. Mosher recalled:

But one time I picked up something of Andrew Lang's that way and, though he made enough already, I tried sending him a check. He sent it right back—and told me what I could do with it. I just answered, "Thanks for returning the check. I know lots of better poets I can use it on."

But when Mosher and Lang later met in England they became friends.

Morley once urged Mosher to write his autobiography, but Mosher replied: "I think there are enough of these in the market. Don't you think quite a few of these things are of a sort to make the judicious grieve?"

When Mosher's library was sold at the Parke-Bernet Galleries in New York in 1948, there came to light a number of letters from Robert Frost to Mosher dating from as early as 1912 before Frost became famous. These letters are now in the Dartmouth College Library. Frost and Mosher had never met, but the correspondence shows

<sup>11</sup> Maxwell Steinhardt, "Mosher," *Quarto Club Papers*, 1927, p. 53.

much frank friendliness between the two as Frost discusses his publishing problems, even including the possibility of Mosher's being his American publisher, and as he replies to some of Mosher's comments on his poems and discusses some of Mosher's books. After his acclaim in England, Frost returned to America and established relations with Henry Holt & Company, but remained friendly with Mosher.

Before long, Frost was called to Portland on a family errand. Then for the first time he met Mosher and was entertained in his home. In the story that Frost tells, we see Mosher toward the end of his life.

He met me at the station. I'd never seen him—didn't know what he was like—and as we went along I noticed him favoring his arm. "Lame arm?" I asked him.

"No, Robert"—he started right off calling me Robert—"just the old stroke, Robert."

"Then you have to be a little careful what you eat . . ."

"No!" he turned on me, "I'll eat what I please while I'm here, God damn it!"<sup>12</sup>

Then Frost describes him at home, wearing a round little skull cap and looking like a funny little innkeeper. Frost says that Mosher preferred

to think of himself romantically as the kind of pirate who would carry a dagger between his teeth. He talked rough and swore the only two regrets of his life were the two hangings he had missed in the days when people used to take a basket lunch and make an outing of it. One was at Liverpool and the other down at Mobile. His father wouldn't let him go ashore.

Among other things Frost tells of Mosher's protesting a sonnet in the *Times* in which the word "intrigue" was used in the slang sense of "fascinate." He was meticulous in his use of words. As an old man Mosher still had enough fun and mischief in him to look up from his mail one evening and ask Frost, "Tell me, Robert, did you ever write any

<sup>12</sup> Ray Nash, "The Poet and the Pirate," *The New Colophon*, II (February 1950), 319.

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real poem besides 'Reluctance'?" But Mosher must have felt a thrill of warm satisfaction when he read on the fly-leaf of a copy of a special edition of *North of Boston*: "Thomas B. Mosher from Robert Frost in veneration and affection Franconia 1920."

### EDITOR'S FOOTNOTE

Won't some good friend of the Colby Library find a copy of the second *Amphora* volume of which Professor Chapman speaks on page 230 and again on page 240, and when a copy has been found present it to the Library? Our Mosher Collection is a large one, and it is growing; but thus far we have been unable to acquire a copy of *Amphora Number Two*.



### LEIGH HUNT'S "EXAMINER"

**I**N October 1807, two young men named Hunt—John and his brother Leigh—announced that they proposed shortly to begin publishing a weekly paper on politics, literature, and the fine arts. The first number appeared in London in January 1808. It was called *The Examiner*, named after the "Examiner" of Jonathan Swift. Leigh Hunt later explained that, in choosing Swift's title, he was not thinking of Swift's politics but rather of his "wit and fine writing, which, in my youthful confidence, I proposed to myself to emulate." Leigh Hunt was twenty-four years old when the *Examiner* began its weekly appearance in the British capital.

Everything went well for a while. "The paper gets on gloriously," Leigh Hunt reported in November 1808 to his future wife. And years later, when some one mentioned *The Examiner* to Thomas Carlyle, he remarked: "I well remember how its weekly coming was looked for

in our village in Scotland. The place of its delivery was besieged by an eager crowd, and its columns furnished the town talk till the next number came."

All went well for several years, until the Hunt brothers ventured upon an exuberant comment on the Prince Regent. In December 1812 they were tried and found guilty of libel, and in February 1813 they were imprisoned. They spent two years in confinement. In 1815, when the Hunts were released from prison, the fortunes of the *Examiner* began, understandably enough, to decline. Instead of the thousands of copies previously sold, their subscriptions fell off, and it may be suspected that this diminished output of the weekly may have had something to do with the fact that *The Examiner* has been absent from Maine libraries. When the *Union List of Serials* was published in 1943, not a single file, not a single copy, of *The Examiner*, was on record in any Maine library.

We are happy to be able to announce an improvement in this sad condition. Thanks to the generous gift of Robert M. Saltz, of Swampscott, Massachusetts (Colby, 1958), the Colby College Library is now in proud possession of a small run of *The Examiner*, which begins in August 1815 (shortly after the Battle of Waterloo) and ends with the issue for March 11, 1816. These numbers include contributions by William Hazlitt; there are references to Lord Byron, recently married; and of course there are many essays and comments by Leigh Hunt himself.

The eighteen numbers of the *Examiner* which Mr. Saltz has given us were all produced five years before Leigh Hunt sailed with his family for Italy, where he made what we now know was a fantastic attempt to establish his household under the same roof with Lord Byron.

Among the most interesting pages in the copies of the *Examiner* which have now come to us are those that contain comments on Napoleon Bonaparte and on his recent departure for the little island where he was destined to spend the rest of his life.

THE SAGE OF CONCORD AND THE  
AUTHOR OF "AMERICA"

By ERNEST C. MARRINER

RALPH WALDO EMERSON and Samuel Francis Smith once met on the same platform, and if a contemporary account can be credited, Emerson came off second best. The occasion was Emerson's second visit to Waterville (now Colby) College in 1863. He had previously spoken there in 1841, at the invitation of one of the literary societies.

Commencement at this central Maine college was a gala event, and not even the Civil War could dampen the enthusiasm of the populace, which came from miles around to attend the festivities. Only a circus could compete with the annual Waterville commencement in drawing a crowd. So it happened that, on Tuesday evening, August 11, 1863, the First Baptist Church of Waterville was packed with citizenry to hear an oration by Mr. R. W. Emerson and a poem by Rev. S. F. Smith.

Waterville's weekly newspaper, the *Eastern Mail*, in its three-column account of commencement, devoted considerable space to the exercises of that Tuesday evening, and the account reveals that, in local opinion at least, the laurels went to the clergyman-poet. The *Mail* said:

"Tuesday evening generally measures the attraction of this festival, and we have never seen a larger audience than that assembled to hear R. W. Emerson's oration and Rev. S. F. Smith's poem. We fear, however, that a large share came with no intention of listening to the exercises, for they had not even the grace to remain quiet during the opening prayer.

"Mr. Emerson's oration was upon *The Office of the Scholar*, and he came with words of counsel such as one standing where he does might offer without presumption, and such as those to whom he came might receive with reverence. He claimed for the scholar a regal rating, neither

priest nor prophet having a higher or holier mission. Mr. Emerson's epigrammatic style of writing is no more peculiar than his oratory; and though he is a forcible speaker, one is not surprised to find his delivery far from smooth and graceful. He stands before you, a figure of sharp angles, with a marked face and head, indicative of character. At times, as he warms to his subject, he draws himself up with stern countenance and piercing eye, his voice ringing out like the challenge of a trumpet. Possessed by great thoughts that struggle for utterance, his sentences are jerked forth abruptly. He fires no blank cartridges; he sends up no blazing rockets; but his solid shot, of tough and well compacted metal, are hurled forth straight to the mark, and you feel that all that is not founded in eternal truth must crumble before the powerful fire.

"Dr. Smith's poem had one great merit, brevity; and it might be said, by no means disparagingly, that it was not too good for the occasion. The versification was smooth and easy, the sentiment pure and elevated, and it enforced a good lesson—labor and wait. The punning allusions to General [Ben] Butler were received with especial favor. While far from being a great poem, this much can be safely said: *Dr. Smith did what Emerson failed to do; he stilled the audience.*"



#### GIL BLAS AT COLBY

ON Thursday, October 10, 1957, Dr. Luella F. Norwood addressed the Colby Library Associates on the subject of Smollett's translation of Le Sage's *Gil Blas*. Since her retirement, Miss Norwood has been making an exhaustive bibliographical study of this work, and has found herself becoming involved in a study also of a later (and inferior) translation which has often been erroneously ascribed to Smollett. Dr. Norwood complimented the

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Colby Library upon its possession of two extremely rare editions of Smollett's translation: one, published in four volumes by Osborne, Rivington & Co. in 1766; the other, published "in parts" (twelve installments) by J. J. Doubochet & Co., London, 1836. At the meeting addressed by Miss Norwood, the presiding officer, Dr. Richard K. Kellenberger, mentioned the fact that the Colby College Library also owns one of the four copies of Smollett's *Ode to Independence* (Glasgow, 1773) which are now known to be in American libraries. The other three are at Yale, the University of Texas, and the New York Public Library.



### SOME RECENT GIFTS

M<sup>RS.</sup> DAVID TERRY MARTIN, of Stillwater, Oklahoma, has presented a copy of Swinburne's *Atalanta*, printed by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press in 1894. She gives the book "In Memory of her friend RUTH DRAPER."

From Mr. Urban Chester Ullman, of The Gunnery, Washington, Connecticut, we have received an autographed, boxed copy (No. 784 of a limited edition) of William S. Booth's *Subtle Shining Secrecies* (Boston, 1925).

Mr. Dan H. Lawrence, of Hofstra College, has given us Henry James's copy of *Le Cahier Jaune: Poems* by Arthur Christopher Benson (Eton, 1892), an inscribed presentation copy (No. 8) from the author. Benson also gave Thomas Hardy a copy (see Hardy's letter of July 30, 1892, about it, quoted in the Colby edition of Hardy *Letters*, p. 34).

We are similarly indebted to Mr. Lawrence for an autograph letter of Sir Sidney Colvin, dated June 17, 1925, acknowledging the receipt of sixty pounds for two letters which Robert Louis Stevenson once wrote to Mrs. Colvin.

## COLBY LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

THIS ORGANIZATION was founded in April, 1935. Its object is to increase the resources of the Colby College Library by securing gifts and by providing funds for the purchase of books, manuscripts, and other material which the Library could not otherwise acquire.

MEMBERSHIP is open to anyone paying an annual subscription of five dollars or more (undergraduates pay fifty cents, and graduates of the college pay one dollar annually during the first five years out of College), or an equivalent gift of books (or other material) needed by the Library. Such books must be given specifically through the ASSOCIATES. The fiscal year of the ASSOCIATES runs from July 1 to June 30. Members are invited to renew their memberships without special reminder at any date after July 1.

Members will receive copies of the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY and notification of the meetings of the society. Officers for 1957-1958 are:

*President*, Frederick A. Potile, Yale University.

*Vice-President*, Richard K. Kellenberger

*Student Vice-Presidents*, Joan L. King, '58, and John O. Curtis, '58.

*Secretary-Treasurer*, John McKenna, *Librarian*.

*Committee on Book Purchases*: Richard Cary (term expires in 1958), Clifford H. Osborne (term expires in 1959), and (*ex officio*) the Vice-President, and the Secretary.

*Editor of the COLBY LIBRARY QUARTERLY*: Carl J. Weber.

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